

# Sudden strike spells misery for Ctg commuters

Transport workers say leaders forced them to take decision because of 'ulterior motives'



Many of these commuters standing by the road had no idea that they would have to wait for ages and still not see a bus coming their way. During yesterday's sudden transport strike, residents had to cram into the handful of buses that were still running, or precariously hang from three-wheelers, risking their lives, just to get to their destination.

ARUN BIKASH DEY, Chattogram

A section of transport workers of the port city suddenly went on a strike yesterday, making commuters endlessly wait for vehicles. The worker leaders said they were compelled to do so to protest "Police harassment".

Regular workers, however, said leaders forced the workers to go on strike because of their ulterior motives.

As public vehicles did not ply different routes, commuters, especially office-goers and students, had to suffer immensely.

Shahidullah Chowdhury, a private-job holder, was seen waiting at Muradpur in the morning for a bus. He said he had been there for about an hour but did not see a single bus.

"I didn't have any idea about the strike," he said. "People are talking about the strike, but there

was no announcement."

Tenth-grader Tasnuva Binte Masud was waiting for a bus at Bahaddarhat intersection like many others there. She was already late for school, as she was standing there for half an hour.

"I tried getting a rickshaw, but they're demanding three to four times the regular fair," she said.

But what actually triggered the sudden strike?

This correspondent contacted several transport workers to find out. Seeking anonymity, many of them said the workers had nothing to do with the strike, rather a section of leaders forced them to take this decision.

It all started after police on Wednesday arrested a person who was extorting money from public vehicles at Kattali on direction of worker leaders, one of them said.

"A section of leaders appoint such people on different routes to

extort money from public vehicles, in the name of 'route expenditure'," he said. "We can't protest this. When police take action against the extortionists, the leaders force us to go on strike to put pressure on police and the administration."

Contacted, Oli Ahmed -- general secretary of Bangladesh Road Transport Workers Federation, Chattogram unit -- said police were harassing transport workers on different routes.

"Police arrested five workers from different areas on Wednesday and filed extortion cases against them," he said. "So, workers went on strike to protest."

Asked about the allegation of forcing workers to go on strike, he denied it. "They did it out of their own volition."

Contacted, Ali Hossain, deputy commissioner of Chattogram Metropolitan Police's traffic division (north), said he did not

know anything about the strike.

Asked about the arrest of five workers, he said they are not workers, rather they were appointed by a section of worker leaders to extort money from public vehicles.

"We will not allow this illegal activity on the roads," he said.

Manjurul Alam Manju, president of Chattogram District Road Transport Owners Association, said transport owners had no connection with the strike.

"The workers went on strike without any valid reason. We do not support it," he said. "If police take legal action against extortionists, workers at large should be happy. But in reality, a section of worker leaders enforced the strike, and common workers had to comply."

"I would like to urge them to call off the strike for the sake of commuters," he added.



PHOTO: RAJIB RAHMAN

# THE TRIFECTA OF DISASTER

Garbage, ditches, stench ravage Nabinagar-Chandra highway in Savar

AKLAKUR RAHMAN AKASH, Savar

The Nabinagar-Chandra highway is one of the busiest highways in the country. But with result of indiscriminate garbage dumping along Ashulia's Palli Bidyut to Baroi para area, the area has become hazardous for both traffic movement, commuters, and locals.

It has become customary to dump garbage from households, kitchen markets, as well as industries in the areas. Despite several attempts by the Roads and Highways Department (RHD), the practise refuses to die down.

This means that the lakhs of passengers plying the area on thousands of vehicles have to sit through the stench and cope with the slow movement of traffic every day.

During a recent visit, this correspondent found garbage dumped on at least eight spots on both sides of the highway's Palli Bidyut to Balivadra area. Passengers were seen passing the area holding their nose, while an RHD signboard forbade garbage dumping in the area.

Along with garbage dumping, the road is also victim to land grabbing. In the rainy season, it basically turns unnavigable, as ditches are created all over.

Local Shumon Mia has to use the road to go to work every day. "I once got into an accident when my motorcycle slipped while moving along a pile of garbage," he told this correspondent recently.

Bus driver Abdul Jalal said passengers scold him to pass the area faster, because of the unbearable stench.

Salahuddin Khan Noyeem, general secretary of Savar Nagorik Committee, told The Daily Star that the problem is created as there is no permanent garbage dumping station in the area, though it houses a huge number of people, including factory workers.

Contacted, RHD Manikganj divisional executive engineer Gaus-ul-Hassan Maruf said they never authorised disposal of any garbage beside the highway.

He also said the highway's longevity is being reduced due to the garbage dumping.

The official maintaining the road is putting a strain on their coffers. "We had to spend an extra Tk 50 lakh on the highway," he said.

The Daily Star talked to Saiful Islam, chairperson of Swanirvar Dhamshona Union Parishad, the most populated UP in Ashulia Industrial area.

Saiful Islam said the situation is created from the lack of a permanent dumping station.

"The union parishad does not have the capability to build such a dumping station. We can only build it if the higher authorities come forward. We have contacted them several times in this regard," he said.

Contacted, UNO Majaharul Islam said he will look into the matter and write to higher authorities concerned.



The Nabinagar-Chandra highway in Savar has turned into nothing less than a dumpster, with all the household garbage and industrial waste being dumped here from the nearby areas. Due to the garbage pile, stench and ditches, the area is now a difficult zone to commute through, for traffic and passersby alike. This photo was taken recently.

PHOTO: STAR



The scores of shirts and pants lying across the roadside were thrown away by Dhaka University students after the halls reopened. As dorms remained closed for more than a year, the pieces of clothing left in the rooms were most probably damaged in some form. But instead of letting the clothes go to waste, people nearby decided to take them away for their own use. This photo was taken yesterday from DU area.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

# Mymensingh gears up for Durga Puja

Idol artisans, rhythmic instrument makers back in business after struggling due to pandemic

MD AMINUL ISLAM, Mymensingh

For the past two years, Durga Puja, the biggest religious festival of the Bengali Hindu community, had lost its colours to the pandemic.

With Covid-19 wreaking havoc on people's lives and livelihoods and festivities put on hold on safety grounds, the artisans of Mymensingh found themselves sitting idle for most of the Puja season, resulting in financial hardships.

But, after a long wait, artisans are now passing busy hours ahead of Durga Puja, to begin from October 11.

"The pandemic put a serious strain on the workers financially, and many resorted to other kinds of work for survival. But this year, they are set to get Tk 50,000 to Tk 60,000 from their ancestral profession by working for three months," said 82-year-old Nikhil Chandra Pal, an artisan based at the city's Dharmashala Temple area.

"I took orders for eight idols from Mymensingh, Jamalpur and Kishoreganj, and the rate is between Tk 20,000 and Tk 40,000. Cost of



PHOTO: STAR

Idol artisans and rhythmic instrument makers in Mymensingh are now passing busy days. With the colours and festivities setting right back in, they hope to make a good fortune this Durga Puja season.

necessary items to make idols is higher than previous years though," said Shambhu Das, proprietor of "Sajib Mrittika Shilpalaya", situated on the city's Rambabu Road.

As the Covid-19 situation further improves, workers will be able to earn more on occasions of Basanti Puja, Ganga Puja, Ganesh Puja, and other festivals occurring round the year, said



73-year-old artisan Subol Pal from Netrakona's Kalmakanda upazila.

At the same time, the business of rhythmic instrument makers has also bounced back after the pandemic.

"We are expecting more puja mandaps in Mymensingh and its adjacent districts this year, and so the orders we got so far is satisfactory,"

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# Need more rehab centres to treat people with addiction

Says home minister

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Due to lack of adequate number of rehabilitation centres across the country, the addicted persons are being deprived of proper treatment, said Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal yesterday.

"The number of people suffering from drug addiction is nearly 80 lakh in the country. It would be a kind of success if we are able to bring eight lakh people back to normal life," he said while addressing the inaugural ceremony of Oasis, a centre for de-addiction and mental health counselling centre, run by the Bangladesh Police Welfare Trust in Dhaka's South Keraniganj as chief guest.

He said all including the government and public representatives have to come forward in this regard.

"We have more than double the capacity of prisoners in jails and most are accused in drug cases," added the home minister.

Benazir Ahmed, inspector general of police, said it is important to stop the demand to make the country narcotics free.

"What we as law enforcement agencies are trying to do is to cut the supply of drugs. Six to seven forces work together in this regard," he said.

IGP said narcotics come from the neighboring countries while talking about the sources of such substances.

"There are a total of 7,000 beds in public-private drug rehabilitation centers in Bangladesh. How many years will it take to treat so many drug addicts?" asked the police chief.

He also revealed that plan to set up another rehab centre in Manikganj.

Health Minister Zahid Maleque, State Minister for Power and Energy Nasrul Hamid and Deputy Inspector General of Dhaka Range Police Habibur Rahman also spoke at the event.

# 'Will not rest till we get justice'

Buet students hold memorial event marking 2 years of Abrar Fahad killing

DU CORRESPONDENT

The murderers of Abrar Fahad, a Buet student, have to be punished immediately, demanded his fellows yesterday, marking two years of the incident.



Abrar Fahad, then second-year student of Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology, was killed in the early hours of October 7, 2019 after he was brutally beaten overnight by Chhatra League leaders and activists at Sher-e-Bangla Hall.

Students of electrical and electronic engineering department, where Abrar was studying, said three of the accused are still absconding. They demanded their immediate arrest.

The memorial event was held around 11am on the campus. The event included street plays, painting display and poem recitals. However, no teacher of the institution was seen to be participating in the programme. Around 1pm, the students formed a human chain in front of Shaheed Minar at Buet.

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A friend and classmate of Abrar remembers him by making his painting, during a memorial event marking the second year of his brutal murder. The event, organised by the students of Buet at their campus yesterday, also included a street play, poem recitals and other cultural activities.

PHOTO: SHUCHISMITA TITHI